

4th WORLD CONFERENCE ON EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY RESEARCHES, WCETR-2014

Alternative Educational System Sudbury Valley as a Model for Reforming School

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Abstract

General trends of innovations in Russian system of education are connected with the ideas of humanism, the priority of developing the child's personality, creative collaboration of teachers and students as equal subjects. In addition, the Russian school officials have nowadays possibilities to implement the variability of curricula, to open author schools. The existing experience of different countries in creation of multi-choice alternative schools, their successful activities and international recognition becomes a real basis for the development of Russian school and pedagogy. These points actualize the research of alternative education systems. The article is devoted to the historical development, and the experience of the alternative educational system Sudbury Valley School, founded in 1968 in Framingham Massachusetts USA. Alternative educational movement Sudbury Valley includes about 40 schools in the United States, Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Israel and others. We consider this educational system a positive model for reforming school in Russia.

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Peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Research and Education Center.

Keywords: alternative education; Sudbury Valley; school; curricula

1. Introduction

In modern Russia, as in many countries of the world, a growing interest in non-traditional, alternative forms of education is observed. Alternative education strengthens new meanings and values of pedagogical culture: mutual understanding, dialogue, partnership, creative collaboration, pedagogical support, self-development, self-organization and self-determination of the growing up person.

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Rich experience of foreign countries in opening of multiple alternative schools, their success and international recognition are of great importance for the development of the Russian school and pedagogy. Among the alternative schools are of special interest those that not only withstood the test of time, but also united dozens of other schools around the world. Alternative democratic Sudbury Valley School (Sudbury Valley) is one of them. It was founded in 1968 in Framingham, Massachusetts, USA. Today the alternative educational movement Sudbury Valley includes about 40 schools in the United States, Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Israel, and others. The youngest Sudbury Valley School is located in Japan and was opened in February 25, 2012

During its forty-six-year history Sudbury Valley approved the original educational model in the context of free education. Sudbury Valley educates free citizens of the community meaning their responsibility, creativity and ability not just to be inwardly free, but also to know how to live in democracy. We believe this explains the popularity of this model of education in countries with developed democratic system. Sudbury Valley School is the institution preparing young people for life in a society, and focusing on graduates' high social culture and respect for public morals (Official Website of Sudbury Valley School).

Comparative theoretical analysis of publications on alternative schools shows that this phenomenon, with all its components and characteristics is of great interest for research. The theory and practice of free education, the activities of alternative schools are described in the works of Ivanov (1996), Epshteyn (1998), Klyachkin (1996), Veykshan (1969), Kuzmenko (1997), Rahkoshkin (2000), Teneneva (2006), Valeev & Valeeva (2014). They've revealed different aspects of the development and implementation of alternative education ideas in Russia and abroad.

Thorough and comprehensive conclusions are made in the study of Valeev (2007) devoted to the theory and practice of free education in the XX century. He details the retrospective development of the theory of free education and pedagogical conditions of its realization in schools. Tsyrlina (2006) researched the phenomenon of the author humanistic school of XX century. Gilyazova (2009) analyzed the development of alternative education in the countries of the British Commonwealth. The benefits and contradictions of alternative education are discussed by Valeeva & Vafina (2014).

Analysis of the history and development of alternative free schools allowed revealing some conceptual provisions of free education. They are: idealization of childhood, belief in the absolute perfection of a child; rejection of the relationship to a child with a template yardstick; waiver of any coercion and violence against a child. Free educators bet on the internal activity of a child, excluding authoritarian position in up-bringing. The educational process means creating conditions for the child's innate characteristics development, as well as providing complete freedom of self-realization (Valeev & Valeeva, 2014).

The goal of the present research is to identify and characterize the historical and theoretical foundations and development of the alternative educational system Sudbury Valley School; to characterize the practice of its implementation.

2. Methods

In compliance with the goal, the following methods have been selected: logical-gnoseological method, comparative and historical retrospective method, the method of updating, selecting, organizing and summarizing the historical facts and the original sources.

3. Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical basis of the Sudbury Valley School ideology is the philosophical and pedagogical concept of Greenberg (1974). He focuses on the harmonious development of a child, on teacher-student interaction as equal subjects of the educational process, correlation of theory and practice, co-dependence of up-bringing and education. Greenberg's conceptual idea is connected with "returning to natural sources." He rejects the values of Western civilization industrial period associated with the production, the social division of labour, consideration of human as a product of education and training carried out by external influences on his psyche. According to him, the source of the educational process alignment structure is the students themselves. In this regard, the activities carried out in Sudbury Valley are aimed on "revival" of intellectual, moral, vocational, social foundations of personality. You

must not form, not teach them, but strengthen the child's natural rudiments of these foundations (Greenberg, 1974).

4. Development of Sudbury Valley

The history of alternative educational system Sudbury Valley formation and development covers the second half of the XX century - the first quarter of the XXI century. The first school appeared in Framingham, Massachusetts in 1968. Its founder is a well-known educator Greenberg, who aimed on creating the just, psychologically comfortable, self-governing school system with a real life as main caregiver. The research showed that the development of schools Sudbury Valley School model can be divided into three main periods.

The I period (1968 - 1989) was of conceptual and organizational character and begins with opening of the first Sudbury Valley school based on the philosophical and pedagogical concept of Greenberg. Despite the originality of the humanistic ideas and totally comfortable psychological atmosphere for children, this concept didn't immediately gain popularity. The second school appeared only in 1981 in Highland, West Virginia (Highland School). According to Greenberg, this was due to several reasons. First, changes in the development of society can take from a few dozen to a few million years. As an example Greenberg leads the transition from a traditional society to agrarian, from agrarian to industrial period. For the recognition of the value of Sudbury Valley School mankind must abandon the material, linear thinking of the industrial society. D. Greenberg calls it the program of "cultural recovery" characterized by the return of man to the natural sources. It requires quite a long time. Excessive concern of parents about successful future for their children (better education, better career, etc.), taps into the background problems of a child's mental stability, emotional balance and harmonious development giving him the freedom of activity "for the soul" choice. The next important factor is the personality of a teacher. Implementing Sudbury Valley ideas demanded enormous enthusiasm, dedication, consistency and pedagogical optimism. That's why in the first ten - fifteen years of these schools activity only a few supported and realized Greenberg's concept (Greenberg, 1974).

The II value-approbation period (1990 - 1999) is characterized by opening and spread of Sudbury Valley schools in the US and abroad. Geographical spread of schools includes large US states (Washington, Colorado, California, Florida) and the developed countries (Japan and Israel). Starting from the point of view of Greenberg, one can assume that the era of post-industrial society in the above countries and states created the urgent need to make a fundamentally new school. Values of industrial society-oriented education aimed on training "good standard employee" gave way to the demands of post-industrial era including creativity, flexibility of thinking, non-standard intelligence. There is a possibility that the post-industrial era in these states occurred earlier and led to the recognition and acceptance of the Sudbury Valley philosophy.

The third - integration and promotional period (2000 - 2012) demonstrates the high level of the Sudbury Valley concept development. Along with US states (Texas, Utah, New Jersey, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Hawaii, and others.) such countries such as Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Israel and others joined the movement (Official Website of Free Democratic School in Berlin; Official Website of the Trillium School; Official Website of the Tokyo Sudbury School).

4. Specific organization features of education in Sudbury Valley School

Based on the analysis of students' vital activity in Sudbury Valley schools, it was concluded that the backbone of activities are creativity and play. Creativity in Sudbury Valley schools stands out as a means of moral education, promotes a child's sense of beauty, reveals the inner creativity and contributes to its fulfillment. Interest in the creative activity of children is due to its importance for the child's personality development. According to Greenberg, human creativity and flexibility are key requirements for graduates of the XXI century. Creative intelligence is the linchpin for the modern world prosperity and motivates the search for intelligent, enterprising initiative (Greenberg, 1992b).

The study showed that the game as children's special form of life promotes in Sudbury Valley School the formation of a full-fledged personality, socialization and self-realization. It has no definite didactic purpose, structure and rules, but it is very important for the development of pupils in the spiritual, physical, emotional, mental aspects. Teachers call it "valuable, deep game» (value, deep play) and consider an indispensable tool for the

development of imagination and creativity of children.

It was found out during the study that the educational process content in Sudbury Valley is to develop with the help of the student his individual educational route, including the assimilation of the experience and achievements of mankind in general. It relies on the child's personal experience in the free choice of occupations. Individual form of training is basic and is manifested in the individual characteristics of children registered in the construction of the educational process, as well as individual assistance for the development of their internal capacity. The main method used by the Sudbury Valley school teachers is "dialectical search" contributing to the development of children's critical thinking, depth of understanding and self-discovery of truth.

Management functions implemented in the school system of children's self-government, which promotes children autonomy in decision-making and implementation of socially significant goals, personal responsibility.

Learning content is determined by the student himself, includes the assimilation of experience and achievements of humanity and is based on the personal experience of the child in the free choice of occupation students. Individual learning is the basic form and is manifested in the individual characteristics of children registered in the construction of the educational process, as well as individual assistance for the development of their internal capacity. The leading method of training in the Sudbury Valley School "recognizes the dialectical search for" contributing to the development of critical thinking, depth of understanding and self-discovery of truth (Greenberg, 1992a).

Based on the foregoing, features of the educational process organization in Sudbury Valley School were highlighted including:

- A small number of pupils;
- Community atmosphere caused by children and adults cooperation, partnership and equality;
- The students own responsibility for the process of education; teacher acts as a personal advisor, consultant and assistant;
- Unified absolutely for all rules and boundaries of personal freedom, developed jointly by adults and children; holding meetings with the presence of all members of the community;
- The location of the educational institution in nature; subject cabinets are open with free access for everyone who wants to;
- Mobility of furniture for individual or group work, conditions for doing manual labor contributing to the pupils' aesthetic development (Official Website of Sudbury Valley School)

5. Conclusions

The study enabled to identify Sudbury Valley School as a promising model of education due to the following advantages compared with the traditional school:

- Training in these schools is based on individual programs taking into account the children's interests, needs and desires;
- Each student is individually and consciously engaged in learning activities, despite the absence of certain mandatory curriculum;
- The staff and children relationships are based on democratic norms and self-government;
- School graduates find themselves in various fields of life and build a successful career at the expense of the ability to adapt effectively to different situations, to solve independently any problems, and work creatively.

Analysis of the positive experience of the alternative education system Sudbury Valley School implementation in various countries (United States, Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, Israel), its correlation with the needs of solving similar problems in modern Russian school, suggests that the prognostic value of the of the Sudbury Valley school experience is the maximum individualization of teaching; creating in school emotionally rich, comfortable atmosphere; uniting students in work, art, sports activities; taking into account linguistic and cultural characteristics of the region; support of school children research in the field of complex global issues with a view to understanding their responsibility for everything that happens in the world. These conditions determine the possibility of using the Sudbury Valley School in the Russian educational practice

Acknowledgements

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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